

Message Text

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PEPR, PLO, SY
SUBJ: PLO STATUS IN SYRIA

1. NEW YORK TIMES CORRESPONDENT MARVINE HOWE ON JAN. 24
TALKED TO ABU LAYLA, DAMASCUS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
PDFLP, AND WE BELIEVE, NUMBER THREE MAN IN HAWATMEH'S
MARXIST GROUP. (HOWE ASKS THAT HER MATERIAL BE TREATED
IN CONFIDENT TO GUARANTEE HER EXCLUSIVE RIGHTS TO
PUBLICATION.) ABU LAYLA DESCRIBED HIS GROUP AS BEING
AMONG THE MAINSTREAM MODERATES OF THE PLO ON QUESTION OF
SETTLING WITH ISRAEL. HE SAID THAT ARAFAT WAS NOT
REPRESENTATIVE OF PLO MODERATES SINCE HE WAS TOO SOFT ON
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EGYPT. NEVERTHELESS, ONLY FATAH CAN GET RID OF ARAFAT
AND THERE IS NO INCLINATION TO DO THIS RIGHT NOW. THE
IRREDUCIBLE MINIMUM DEMANDS FOR THE MODERATES IN THE
PLO ARE: (1) A PALESTINIAN STATE ON THE WEST BANK AND
GAZA WHICH IS COMPLETELY INDEPENDENT; (2) RECOGNITION OF
THE PLO AS POLITICALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS TERRITORY;
AND (3) AGREEMENT ON THE RIGHT OF REFUGEES TO RETURN TO

THEIR HOMES IN PALESTINE. HE SAID THAT THE MODERATES WOULD AGREE TO A UN MANDATE FOR A TRANSITIONAL PERIOD OF TIME. HE ADDED THAT FOUR YEARS AGO NO PALESTINIAN COULD STOMACH THE IDEA OF AN ISRAELI STATE. NOW, HOWEVER, THE MODERATES CAN AND THEY DEFINITELY HOLD THE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE PLO. HE SAID THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY THAT THE PALESTINIANS COULD ACCEPT JORDANIAN RULE. NOR DID TH FEEL THAT THERE WAS ANY THREAT OF ESTABLISHING AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE PLO IN THE WEST BANK.

2. AS TO HOW MANY PALESTINIANS WOULD LEAVE SYRIA FOR A PALESTINIAN STATE, ABU LAYLA SAID THAT THIS WOULD DEPEND ON THE INSTRUCTIONS OF THE PLO. IF THE PLO ADVISED PALESTINIANS TO GO, 100,000 OF THE 300,000 WOULD DO SO. NEVERTHELESS, THE CURRENT LEADERSHIP, IF IT IS STILL IN POWER, WOULD GIVE THESE PEOPLE PASSPORTS AND URGE THEM TO STAY IN SYRIA. ABU LAYLA SAID THAT THE MAJORITY OF PALESTINIANS IN SYRIA ARE LOYAL TO THE PLO. A SMALL MINORITY HAVE JOINED OTHER PARTIES LIKE THE BAATH, BUT MOST PALESTINIANS THINK OF THE PLO AND ITS VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS AS THEIR POLITICAL PARTY. BEFORE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PLO, PALESTINIANS FOUND THEIR POLITICAL EXPRESSION IN THE SYRIAN PARTIES.

3. ABU LAYLA SAID THERE IS TILL A LOT OF BAD FEELING IN THE RUFUGEE CAMPS IN SYRIA AGAINST THE ASSAD REGIME FOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ITS ACTIVITIES IN LEBANON. PALESTINIANS IN SYRIA ARE BITTER AT NOT BEING ALLOWED TO RRABEL ABROAD THROUGH SOME STUDENTS ARE GIVEN PEMISSION TO LEAVE. THEY ARE ALSO ANGRY THAT OTHER PALESTINIANS CANNOT ENTER SYRIA FREELY. TIGHT RESTRICTIONS HAVE BEEN PLACED ON THE PALESTINIANS SINCE 1976. ALL DEMONSTRATIONS AND MASS MEETINGS NEED APPROVAL BY THE SYRIAN AUTHORITIES AND NO APPROVALS WERE GRANTED IN 1976 AND MOST OF 1977. THERE IS TIGHT CONTROL OF ALL PALESTINIAN PUBLICATIONS. ONCE ACTIVE PALESTINIAN UNIONS WERE ALL BUT ABANDONED BY THE PLO SINCE 1976 DUE TO OVERWHELMING INFILTRATION BY SYRIAN BAATH AND SAIQA. THE ONLY UNION WHICH HAS NOT BEEN INFILTRATED HAS BEEN THE WRITERS' UNION WHICH IS TILL ACTIVE. ALL TRAINING CAMPS AND GUERRILLA BASES WERE CLASED IN SYRIA DURING THE LEBANON CRISIS WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ONE SYMBOLIC TRAINING CAMP FOR EACH MOVEMENT. EACH MOVEMENT WAS PERMITTED ONE FORMAL OFFICE IN DAMASCUS AND TWO INFORMAL OFFICES. BEFORE 1976 PALESTINIANS WERE ALLOWED TO CARRY WEAPONS BUT SINCE THEN NO SUCH PERMISSION HAS BEEN GRANTED WITH THE EXCEPTION OF FOUR OR FIVE GUARDS FOR EACH OF THE MOVEMENTS' LEADERS.

4. THERE WAS PASSIVE PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE IN SYRIA DURING THE LEBANON CRISIS ACCORDING TO ABU LAYLA. MANY SOLDIERS OF THE PLA DESERTED. THE SYRIANS TRIED TO MOBILIZE THE PALESTINIANS TO SUPPORT THEIR POLICY BUT FAILED. THE POLICY OF NO ECONOMIC OR SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS IN SYRIA HAS WORKED AGAINST DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE POLITICAL MILITANCY. SINCE THE SADAT INITIATIVE, THERE HAS BEEN GENERAL RELAXATION ON RESTRICTIONS ON PALESTINIANS THOUGH THE RELAXATION HAS NOT REACHED PRE-1976 LEVELS. THERE HAS BEEN AGREEMENT ON REOPENING THE GUERRILLA AND TRAINING CAMPS AND THE LAST BATCH OF 70 PALESTINIAN PRISONERS (TFT OF 460 TOTAL FORMER DETAINEES) WERE RELEASED A WEEK AGO. THE STUDENTS' UNION WHICH HAD BEEN CLOSED DOWN IS NOW LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONSIDERING REOPENING.

5. COMMENT: ABU LAYLA'S REMARKS CONFIRM VARIOUS REPORTS THAT WE HAD HEARD CONCERNING SYRIA-PLO AGREEMENT TO PERMIT THE PLO TO RESUME SOME OF THEIR FORMER ACTIVITIES IN SYRIA FOLLOWING FORMATION OF A SYRIAN-PLO FRONT TO CONFRONT SADAT. HOWEVER, WE DOUBT THAT THE SYRIANS ARE NOW PREPARED TO PERMIT

THE PALESTINIANS THE AMOUNT OF FREEDOM TO ORGANIZE AND TRAIN THEY ENJOYED PRIOR TO JUNE 1976. ABU LAYLA'S REMARKS ALSO RECONFIRM THAT THE MARXIST PLO, WHICH REMAINS UNDER STRONG SOVIET INFLUENCE, IS ONE OF THE PLO ORGANIZATIONS MOST READY TO COME TO TERMS WITH ISRAEL IF ITS MINIMAL DEMANDS ARE MET.
MURPHY

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